

Also, because parents are our children's first and most important teachers, the proposal includes challenge grants to help parents do more to teach their children to read. I think that is critically important, and that is a part of the program that is in the budget. These approaches are the best things we know to do to teach our kids to read. They're already working in places like Simpson County, Kentucky, where AmeriCorps members help students jump an average of 3 grade levels in 8 months; working in Reading, Ohio, where trained parent volunteers are helping their kindergarten-aged children make 3 times the progress of children who don't get the extra help; working in my home State of Arkansas, where the Home Institution Program for Preschool Youngsters, HIPPPY, brings parents into their children's learning process with stunning results; working here in the District of Columbia, where this February we launched DC Reads to bring together literacy programs and local volunteer reading tutors. With America Reads, it can work all over the country for every child who needs it.

This reflects the commitment, I might add, that thousands of Americans made at the Presidents' Summit on Service in Philadelphia a few months ago, to marshal the resources of every part of our society to help our children get a good education, get basic health care, do it in a safe environment with adult mentors, and with a chance for all children themselves to serve.

We've made a lot of progress since the summit on all fronts. Especially, I want to note that we've increased the number of AmeriCorps scholarships, recognized high school service, encouraged private businesses to help parents move from welfare to work. But we have to give all children the chance to learn and all Americans the chance to serve. The great thing about America Reads is it serves two of the goals of the summit: It gives children a good education, and it gives young people the chance to serve.

It would be a shame, with all the children out there who still need help learning to read and who want to get it, with all the parents who are yearning to do the best job they can as parents raising their children, with all the idealistic students and other American citi-

zens who want to be a part of this program—it would be a shame if we did not reach the full goal of America Reads. We have to have a bipartisan commitment to education that transcends politics. We have to have a follow-through on the bipartisan commitment to fund America Reads to its full potential.

The renowned African-American educator Mary McLeod Bethune once said, "The whole world opened up to me when I learned to read." We read "The Carrot Seed" today. Instead of the carrot, think about Victoria. Think about a million Victorias. Think about millions and millions more. We are the planters of the seed. We have to first plant the seed, and then we have to tell the doubters it will grow.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:43 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Robert A. Corrigan, president, San Francisco State University; Eric Castillo, tutor, America Reads Foundation; Victoria Adeniji, second-grade student tutored in the America Reads program, and her mother, Felicia; and Carol H. Rasco, Director, America Reads Foundation.

## Remarks to the Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues

October 21, 1997

Thank you, Eleanor, for that introduction. We've been friends a long time and, frankly, I had forgotten that I had done some of those things. [*Laughter*] Thank you, Nancy Johnson, Madam Secretary. Thank you, First Lady, for now spending more than half your life at least acquainted with me in some form or fashion—[*laughter*—almost half of it married.

I congratulate the members of the caucus on 20 years of leadership. I thank Women's Policy Inc. for hosting this event, and I am delighted to be here, not only with the Secretary of State but also with Audrey Haines, the Director of the White House Office for Women's Initiatives and Outreach, and several other outstanding senior officials of the White House.

I, too, want to pay tribute to Margaret Heckler and Elizabeth Holtzman for their vision in creating this office, for the leadership

that—[applause]—thank you—for the past leadership of Olympia Snowe and Pat Schroeder, Connie Morella, and Nita Lowey. And, of course, to Nancy Johnson and Eleanor Holmes Norton, who show no lack of energy in pressing your cause with the President.

When Nancy mentioned there are now 52 members of this caucus in the House of Representatives, I was sitting next to Hillary, and I knew what she was thinking: That's about 52 too few. [Laughter] And I was thinking it, too, based on your record.

I think the thing that has been overlooked in this whole endeavor of trying to give more sensitivity to issues of special concern to women and trying to give women more opportunities to serve is that we live in an age where every public figure says, as if it were just a cliché, that the most important resource in any human endeavor in the private sector or the public sector is our people. And yet, we cavalierly go on in example after example after example not giving all our people the chance to live up to the fullest of their God-given capacities and make the greatest service they can to the rest of us to promote the general welfare. I've done what I could to correct that, partly based on the example of my wife, my mother, and my grandmother, and partly because I have known so many of you personally, and partly because it is manifest that we have to find a way to reach across all the lines in our society and lift up everyone to the position of his or her highest and best use and potential.

In that connection, I would like to thank the newly confirmed Ambassador to the Vatican, Lindy Boggs, for her willingness to serve.

I've been proud to work with you on a lot of issues. Most of them have been mentioned tonight—the family and medical leave law, which has changed more lives than almost any bill that we've passed around here in a long time. Everywhere I go around the country now, people still come up to me and tell me personal stories of how that law changed their lives. The Kassebaum-Kennedy bill, the minimum wage, the child care, the adoption tax credit, increased child support enforcement, the family violence initiatives—all these things have made a dif-

ference. The hand of this caucus was felt heavily in the recent balanced budget, with the single biggest aid to education increase since '65, the biggest increase in aid to children's health since Medicaid in '65, and the children's tax credit. So, the country is in your debt.

And I do believe that the bipartisan nature of this caucus has made a profound difference. I know that we're joined tonight by the Democratic leader, Dick Gephardt, and I believe Speaker Gingrich wanted to be here and had to be in Georgia tonight. I know Mr. Gephardt would agree with me that all of us have been impressed by how you are able to stay together, work together, and, in Eleanor's terms, get down to business no matter how crazy things get in this occasionally loony town. And for that, too, we are all in your debt, for you set an example that everyone else should follow.

I'd like to talk just a moment about health issues. Hillary mentioned them and has worked on them so hard, and others have mentioned them. The budget not only provided for \$24 billion to extend health coverage to 5 million children who don't have it, thus giving greater peace of mind to the parents who are raising them, both as parents and also when they're away at work, it did a lot more for the health of women. It expanded Medicare to cover bone mass measurement for women at risk of osteoporosis. Funding for osteoporosis research has now reached more than \$100 million at NIH. It expanded Medicare to cover annual mammograms for all women over the age of 49 and eliminated the copayments to make these examinations more affordable. These were important things, and we have more to do.

We have to continue our focus on women's health. Since I took office, funding for breast cancer research, prevention, and treatment has almost doubled, and we've discovered two breast cancer genes, holding great promise for the development of new prevention strategies, something that's profoundly important to all of us who have ever dealt with this in our families.

We're unlocking the mysteries of the genetic code and continuing to discover new ways to diagnose and treat genetic disorders. But we know that these breakthroughs also

bring with them the need for new protections. Studies show the leading reason women do not take advantage of new genetic breast cancer tests is because they fear they will be discriminated in health plans if the tests come out the wrong way. This is wrong, and it ought to be illegal.

So I want to work with you to get Congress to pass bipartisan legislation that will ban all health plans, group and individual, from denying coverage or raising premiums on the basis of genetic tests. After all, if we can get everybody to take the tests, if they know what they're up against, in the end we will prevent more severe illness, we will reduce cost to the health care system, and we shouldn't punish individuals for doing something that we know is not only in their own interest but is in the interest of society.

Also, legislation should prohibit all health plans from disclosing genetic information that could be misused by other insurers. It ought to protect researchers' ability to make the best use of this important tool. So, again, let me applaud those, especially Representative Slaughter and Senator Snowe, for their leadership. Genetic discrimination legislation deserves action now.

Let me also say that many of you in this room have contributed to our efforts to support legislation to protect women who have had mastectomies. They shouldn't be forced out of the hospital before they're ready because of pressure from a health plan. It's unacceptable that Congress has not yet held a hearing on the DeLauro-Dingell-Roukema 48-hour mastectomy patient protection bill, and we need to keep pushing for that.

And finally, we need to keep breaking down the doors and breaking through the glass ceilings and acting to bring women the full measure of economic and legal equity to which they're entitled. This caucus and our administration, under the leadership of Aida Alvarez, continues to work to counter the effects of discrimination and long-developed networks which hinder the success of women- and minority-owned businesses. I'm proud of the fact that the SBA in the last 5 years has tripled the number of loans to women businesses, and I thank you for your support of the disadvantaged business enterprise program, which has successfully in-

creased the percentage of women- and minority-owned construction firms. I'm pleased to say that this has now passed both Houses, and I hope you'll keep up the fight so that it actually reaches my desk.

Twenty years after its creation, the Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues commands the respect that you've always deserved. You now have a record you can be proud of. You work in a way that you can be proud of. You can feel the respect here in this audience this evening of all the people who have come to pay tribute.

Tonight is a night for celebration. We celebrate an initiative taken in 1977, a celebration of 20 years of hard work, of the many initiatives that you have accomplished, but most importantly, I'm here to celebrate the energy, the intelligence, the character, and the old-fashioned patriotic devotion to the task at hand that will bring you even more brilliant achievements in the years ahead.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:27 p.m. in the Mellon Auditorium at the Department of Commerce. In his remarks, he referred to Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton and Representative Nancy L. Johnson, cochairs, former Representatives Margaret M. Heckler and Elizabeth Holtzman, founders and original cochairs, and former Representative Patricia Schroeder, former cochair, Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues; and former Representative Corinne Claiborne (Lindy) Boggs.

## **Remarks at a Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee Dinner**

*October 21, 1997*

Thank you very much. Thank you for being here. Thank you for your exuberant welcome. Thank you for what it means. You know that our country is better off than it was 5 years ago. You know it's because we worked together to change the direction of this country. And you know that's what really counts in the lives of the American people. We could use more of you in Washington, DC, reminding people here about what really counts in the lives of the American people. And we thank you for your support.

I want to thank, first of all, Tom Daschle. There is no way that I can convey to you